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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000564

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ROTTERDAM FOR BKETTNER  
PARIS FOR TSA NLARBI

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SUBJECT: OPIUM SMUGGLER SEIZED FROM IRANIAN FERRY: AN  
EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Matthew Tueller, Reasons  
1.4 (a) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: During a February 2, 2005 visit to observe the International Shipping and Port Facility Security posture at the ferry vessel passenger terminal, Shuwaikh Port in Kuwait City, Econoff and visiting US Coast Guard LCDR Brenden Kettner were unexpected witnesses to a drug seizure and detention of a possible smuggler by Kuwait Customs officials. Over 1/2 kilogram of opium was discovered on one of the ferry passengers newly arrived from Iran on board the Iranian flagged ferry vessel Brelyan. The Econoff and LCDR Kettner where invited to witness the investigation and interview of the suspect. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C/NF) Econoff and visiting International Port Security Liaison Officer LCDR Brenden Kettner, USCG, were concluding their February 2 security visit at Shuwaikh Port when their host, Mohammed, head of Customs at the port, was informed that one of his Customs inspectors had found something. Mohammed excitedly explained that his agent had discovered a smuggler with drugs in his shoes. Mohammed escorted the Econoff and Kettner into one of the examination rooms where the suspect was being detained.

¶3. (C/NF) Upon entering the crowded room, Econoff saw one man sitting in dejected silence in a nearby chair, his hands in front of him, although not tied or restrained by handcuffs, head bent down. The remaining men in the room were all Customs officials. Every so often one of them would shout a question at the suspect in Arabic. Mohammed would periodically summarize parts of certain discussions for the two non-Arabic speakers in the room (Econoff and LCDR Kettner), but for the most part the conversations were conducted in Arabic.

¶4. (C/NF) Shortly after the Econoff and Kettner entered the interview room, another Customs official brought in the shoes that the suspect had been wearing upon his arrival to the port. The shoes had been reconstructed as evidenced by the crude stitching used to reconnect the inside lining of the shoe to the sole with poor quality stitching dissimilar to other stitching on the shoes. Two customs investigators tore the shoes apart, lifting up the soles and lining in the loafers. They discovered little plastic bags filled with a flat, brown, paste-like substance. Mohammed said that it was opium. One of the customs officers brought out a scale to verify the weight of the plastic bags. He also used a narcotic test kit to verify that the substance was opium. A little over 180 grams of opium was discovered in the shoes.

¶5. (C/NF) Mohammed sat down with the suspect, offered him tea, and, in a soothing voice, began to question him. After about 5 minutes of questioning, two more Customs officials entered the room carrying the suspect's suitcase. They proceeded to empty the suitcase and inspect all its pockets, seams, and lining. After a brief inspection, one of the Customs investigators ripped part of the lining and discovered what looked like purple cellophane-wrapped 1x2 inch flat packets. Mohammed explained that it was more opium wrapped in carbon paper. (NOTE: Since the questioning was conducted in Arabic it is unclear to the Econoff if the suspect admitted to having more opium in his suitcase or if the Customs officials discovered it themselves. END NOTE).

¶6. (C/NF) The carbon paper prevents the x-ray machine from "reading" the packets in the lining, Mohammed explained. Econoff and LCDR Kettner were given a demonstration. Customs officials took the suitcase back out to the x-ray machine and ran it through again. The opium, visible when looking at the suitcase, was not visible on the x-ray machine's display screen.

¶7. (C/NF) After returning to the interview room the suitcase was taken apart. Little carbon-covered packets were found all along the exterior wall's lining. The total amount of opium seized was just over 1/2 kilogram.

18. (C/NF) Once all of the opium had been removed from the suitcase, tested and weighed, Mohammed began to question the suspect again. This time, however, he wrote down the suspect's responses. Periodically Mohammed would stop to explain what he was doing to the Econoff and LCDR Kettner, but he never directly translated what the suspect was saying. After about 30 minutes of interviewing, Econoff and LCDR Kettner left. Mohammed suspended his questioning to escort them out. During the walk to the exit, Econoff inquired about the next steps that Customs would take in the arrest of the smuggler. Mohammed explained that while Customs has the authority to detain and question a suspect, they cannot arrest anyone. He said that after questioning the suspect and taking his statement the police would be called to make the arrest and take the suspect to a holding facility.

19. (C/NF) NOTE: LCDR Kettner mentioned to Econoff that he had previously worked on an anti-narcotics team. In his experience, he said, drug smugglers sometimes travel in groups. When a suspect was detained on suspicion of smuggling, his team would ensure that they did not become so focused on that particular person that they failed to continue to be able to detect other suspicious persons. He also stated that they would look to see who that person was traveling with and question them as well. He said that his team made sure to keep a number of team members outside the interview room to continue to watch the remaining persons. LCDR Kettner mentioned these points to the Econoff because he noticed that the Kuwaiti Customs team appeared to be overly focused on this one particular individual. LCDR Kettner noted that a majority of the Customs officials were in the interview room, that no other travelers appeared to be questioned and that no one was trying to identify whom the suspect was traveling with or had been talking to prior to his arrest. END NOTE.

110. (U) This cable has been cleared by LCDR Brenden Kettner, USCG.  
LEBARON